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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KIRF](#) [CH](#)  
SUBJECT: HUMAN RIGHTS: PASTOR ZHANG MINGXUAN'S NOVEMBER 28  
DETENTION, "BAN" ON CHINESE HOUSE CHURCH ALLIANCE

Classified By: Political Internal Unit Chief  
Dan Kritenbrink. Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

1. (C) The head of the Chinese House Church Alliance (CHCA), Pastor Zhang Mingxuan, told PolOff that authorities in his hometown of Nanyang City, Henan Province, detained him for several hours on November 28 for questioning and to inform him that CHCA had been "abolished." Zhang said he did not know the significance of the decision to "ban" CHCA or what further steps against the organization might follow. Peter Ford (protect), the Christian Science Monitor's Beijing Bureau Chief, was in Nanyang on November 28 to interview Zhang and witnessed approximately a dozen "incompetent" officials disrupt a small prayer meeting held at a house owned by Zhang's friend that same morning. Zhang reportedly told Ford that 1986 to 2000 was the "most difficult period" for Chinese Christians, with the situation having improved since then, due to international pressure and the willingness of Christians to "stand up" for themselves. End Summary.

ZHANG DETAINED FOR QUESTIONING, INFORMED OF "BAN"

2. (C) Chinese House Church Alliance (CHCA) head Pastor Zhang Mingxuan told PolOff December 2 that PRC authorities detained him for several hours at a hotel in Nanyang City, Henan Province, on November 28 for questioning and to inform him that the Ministry of Civil Affairs had issued a decision "abolishing" CHCA as an "unregistered and unauthorized social organization." (NOTE: Pastor Zhang Mingxuan is co-founder and president of CHCA, which was established in April 2005 to defend the rights of house church Christians and engage in missionary work and charitable activities. Based in Beijing, where Zhang moved in 1998, CHCA reportedly has a membership of 250,000. Authorities have detained Zhang on multiple occasions, beginning in 1986 after his conversion to Christianity. The U.S. Government has advocated vigorously on behalf of Zhang and his family members, including in October 2008 when Pastor Zhang was detained in Yunnan Province and his two sons severely beaten in Beijing.)

3. (C) The Christian Science Monitor's Beijing Bureau Chief Peter Ford (protect) was in Nanyang the day of Zhang's detention. Ford told PolOff on December 5 that he had traveled there the day before, November 27, to interview Zhang for an article on China's reform and opening period. According to Ford, on November 28 Zhang left a small residence owned by one of Zhang's friends, where Ford and Zhang had been staying, to buy food for breakfast. After Zhang had been gone about 45 minutes, Zhang's wife, who was also at the residence, concluded that Zhang had been detained by authorities.

14. (C) Later that same morning, approximately 15 people arrived at Zhang's friend's home for a prayer meeting, Ford told PolOff. With Zhang gone, the group decided that Zhang's wife should lead the meeting in his place. Shortly after the meeting began, Ford said, about a dozen local Religious Affairs Bureau (RAB) and provincial foreign affairs office (waiban) officials entered the house. Zhang's wife did not notice the officials, Ford said, because she was in what appeared to be "a religious trance." Other worshippers in the room saw the authorities enter but seemed not to know what to do. Congregants and officials alike held their silence for a short period while Zhang's wife continued, eyes closed, until someone tapped her on the shoulder. A seemingly "cordial" exchange between Zhang Mingxuan's wife and Nanyang officials followed, involving informal "banter" and handshaking, Ford said, during which officials told Zhang's wife that the church gathering was "illegal."

15. (C) The officials present at the house on November 28 were "laughably incompetent," Ford said. Ford believed that none of the officials were from Beijing, given that they and Zhang's wife "clearly knew each other" and that the officials were "highly incompetent clowns." Ford told PolOff that authorities treated Zhang's wife well during the period he observed them at Zhang's friend's house, but he could not confirm this was the case outside his presence. Pastor Zhang called Ford later during the evening of November 28 to say he had been released, stating that he had refused authorities' request to sign a document acknowledging the decision

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abolishing CHCA. (NOTE: Ford likewise said Zhang told him he had received "relatively good" treatment, despite having his movements obviously restricted, during his previous detention in October 2008 in Kunming. In this prior incident, Zhang was detained on October 16 in Kunming (the same day his sons were beaten in Beijing), transported several days later to his hometown in Nanyang City, Henan Province, and then released on October 27 after the Ambassador, other high-ranking U.S. officials and Members of Congress urged China to free Zhang.)

16. (C) Media reports claiming that authorities confiscated over 600 Bibles at the November 28 prayer meeting were "likely untrue," Ford told PolOff. Ford saw only "four or five" Bibles at the meeting, noting that the house where the meeting took place was small and had no storage. Ford concluded it was therefore "impossible" for a large number of Bibles and other religious materials to have been confiscated from this location. Ford characterized the November 28 incident as one involving, "stupid harassment, not genuine persecution." Ford also said the congregants were "remarkably media savvy, considering their rural location." One reportedly suggested that Ford file a story on the incident immediately after authorities interrupted the prayer meeting.

SIGNIFICANCE OF BAN ON CHCA UNCLEAR

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17. (C) Henan officials questioned Ford on November 28 about his connection to Zhang, leading Ford to conclude that officials may have at first assumed he was a missionary. Once authorities learned Ford was a journalist, the questions became "aimless" and soon ended. Officials did not confiscate any papers or tapes from Ford's interview with Zhang, and Ford left Nanyang in the early afternoon of the same day. As stated above, following his release later that same evening, Zhang told Ford he had refused authorities' request to sign a document acknowledging CHCA's abolishment. Ford questioned Zhang about the significance of the document, asking "How can they abolish something that doesn't legally exist?" Zhang agreed that it made no sense to "abolish" an

organization with no legal status and said he did not know why Chinese officials had done this.

¶8. (C) Zhang reportedly told Ford he does not know what the significance of the "ban" on CHCA will be or whether it presages further steps against the organization. (NOTE: A group of Christian legal professionals has signed a declaration opposing CHCA's abolishment, warning that China could use this tactic against other Christian house churches. On December 4, a Beijing court rejected Zhang's attempt to file an administrative complaint opposing the decision to abolish CHCA, which incorporated the declaration of the Christian legal professionals.)

¶9. (C) Despite the ban, Zhang said authorities had recently "attacked (CHCA) less" and stated to Ford his belief that he would "not be hurt too much" as a consequence of the November 28 events. Ford surmised that the "ban" on CHCA could either be a "bureaucratic formality" intended to please superiors of local officials, or an "ominous sign" of things to come. (NOTE: Don Parrott (protect), an American Christian who imports Bibles and proselytizing materials into China and who was waiting for Zhang at a "safe" location in Kunming on October 16 when Zhang was detained at the Kunming airport, believes things "may not get better" for Zhang. Chinese officials accord Zhang "special treatment" because of his connections with foreigners, Parrott claimed. Zhang is prone to take risks others would not, Parrott said, because of a strong belief that faith and foreign intervention will insulate him from serious harm.

SITUATION FOR CHRISTIANS "IMPROVED" SINCE 2000

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¶10. (C) During Ford's interview of Zhang in Henan, Zhang reportedly said the most difficult period for Chinese Christians was between 1986 and 2000. Zhang attributed the "improving situation" for Christians since 2000 to "international pressure" and the increased willingness of Chinese Christians to "stand up" for themselves. Despite the recent attack on Zhang's sons and other ongoing harassment, Zhang said officials are using "oppressive" tactics "less frequently" because "they understand this only pushes people to Christ."  
Piccuta